

## The Emergence of Government Evaluation Systems in Africa: The Case of Benin, Uganda and South Africa

*Evaluation is not widespread in Africa, particularly evaluations instigated by governments rather than donors. However, since 2007, an important policy experiment is emerging in South Africa, Benin and Uganda, which have all implemented national evaluation systems. These three countries, along with CLEAR Anglophone Africa and Independent Development Evaluation at the African Development Bank, are partners in a pioneering African partnership called Twende Mbele, funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Hewlett Foundation, aiming to jointly strengthen monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and work with other countries to develop M&E capacity and share experiences.*

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**N**ational Evaluation Systems (NES) which encapsulate monitoring and evaluation have developed in advanced economies since the 1980s and are perceived as an important means of improving performance in the public sector. Since the 1990s NES have developed in Latin America and from 2007 in Africa (Benin), and Uganda and South Africa in 2011. Evaluation in particular has been seen as a route to strengthening effectiveness, efficiency and impact, as well as accountability of government policies and programmes

In 2011 an informal partnership and dialogue emerged as Benin, Uganda and South Africa realised they were on similar trajectories in developing an NES. Leveraging this informal partnership, the Department for International Development (DFID) agreed to support these countries through a peer learning programme, Twende Mbele, to promote the use of M&E as a tool for improving government performance and accountability in Africa.

Initial Twende Mbele partners were Benin, Uganda, South Africa, CLEAR AA and Independent Development Evaluation at the AfDB. This partnership started formally in January 2016 and involved collaboration, capacity development and sharing of experience with other African countries. In 2017 the Hewlett Foundation also started funding Twende Mbele. This article seeks to document the situation with M&E in these countries at an early stage of the

partnership, and the lessons emerging at this stage.

### An emerging analytical framework

Literature on NES remains predominantly authored by Western scholars, creating a challenge in finding useful frameworks within existing literature that speaks to emerging evaluation trends in an African context. One such framework by Holvoet and Renard (2007) however applies to a developing country context, where poverty-reduction efforts are the focus. This framework illustrates the key features of an effective NES and is centred on the dimensions of state construction as these systems in Africa tend to still be fairly nascent in their development. Figure 1 shows the adapted version used in this article.

The elements in Holvoet and Renard's framework are sixfold, with each having a distinct public sector rubric:

- The first element is *policy*, which suggests the presence of an evaluation *plan*, a clear differentiation between the roles of monitoring versus evaluation, a system that seeks to ensure *autonomy and impartiality* of the evaluators and one that puts *feedback* into use and into *planning and budgeting*.
- The second element is *methodology* which includes selection of ►

- ▶ *indicators*, how evaluations are *selected* and *priorities* established, whether there is some form of programme theory or *causal chain* in the programmes, and in the evaluations, which *methodologies* are used and how *data are collected*.
- The third element focuses on organization. Factors suggested include *coordination* of the system, the role of the *national statistical office*, *line ministries* and *decentralized levels of government* and how the system links with projects.
- Capacity makes up the fourth element, factors include *acknowledgement of the problem* and possession of a *capacity-building plan*.
- The fifth element, *participation of actors outside government*, is a key differentiator to other systems, this includes *Parliament*, *civil society* and *donors*. This is important for accountability and, where donors are important, integrating donors into the system.

- *Quality* makes up the last element, this factor the quality of the product and process and how the products and services feeds into *use* internally and externally.

### Emerging findings regarding national evaluation systems

The emerging findings on Benin, Uganda and South Africa show that all three countries have developed responses in most of the six elements of an NES. With regard to national evaluations, South Africa has undertaken a larger number of evaluations (56 as of December 2016–Uganda 23; Benin 15), reflecting the greater ability of the government to fund evaluations. Further, the scope of the evaluations differs - Benin’s evaluations in particular are at the policy rather than the programme level, therefore covering a broader scope, but in less depth.

#### Policy

All three countries have a national evaluation policy. In South Africa, this was ▶▶

**Figure 1: Six characteristics of an effective national evaluation system (Genesis 2016).**

1	POLICY	The Evaluation Plan	M VS. E	Autonomy and Impartiality	Feedback	Alignment Planning and Budgeting	
2	METHODOLOGY	Selection of indicators	Selection Criteria	Priority Setting	Causality Chain	Methodologies Used	Data Collection
3	ORGANIZATION	Coordination and Oversight	Statistical Office	Line Ministries	Decentralized Levels	Link with Projects	
4	CAPACITY	Problem Acknowledged	Capacity Building Plan				
5	PARTICIPATION OF ACTORS OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT	Parliament	Civil Society	Donors			
6	QUALITY	Effective use of M&E	Internal Usage of M&E Findings				

Source: Holvoet and Renard (2007).

► developed prior to developing the NES; in Benin and Uganda both countries were in the process of implementing a national system before ‘developing a policy’. All three developed an evaluation agenda or plan to prioritize evaluations for each year.

The evaluation system is differentiated from monitoring, and in all three cases mechanisms for promoting autonomy and impartiality have been developed, including the important role of the central unit in managing the interface between supply and demand from central policy units. All use independent service providers for reasons of independence. All countries have a system for dissemination, but this can be enhanced to widen knowledge of evaluation results. There is still a challenge to build the links between evaluation with planning and budgeting, although in 2016 the budget papers in South Africa included a section on the results of evaluations, an important move forward.

**Methodology**

The methodology of the NES, that is, the main architecture for the system is summarised in Table 1. Selection in all cases is around government priorities. In some cases, this is a top-down decision (e.g. Benin, Uganda), whereas in South Africa there is a mix of bottom-up proposals from departments and strategic proposals from the DPME and National Treasury. In all three countries, most evaluations undertaken are process and implementation evaluations, which have a more rapid feedback into policy. In most cases, theories of change (ToC) and logframes are developed retrospectively against which the evaluation is conducted.

**Organization**

All three Twende partner countries have centrally located units within the Presidency or Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). There are decentralized M&E units in departments ►

**Table 1: Comparing methodology elements across the three countries.**

Components	Benin	Uganda	South Africa
<b>Clear selection criteria</b>	Yes. In line with development priority. Bureau of Evaluation and National Evaluation Board	Criteria for selection of evaluations robust and executed by the Evaluation Sub-Committee	Yes. Priorities set for evaluation plans at all levels
<b>Programmes/policies being evaluated have a programme theory</b>	They have a logframe. ToC not common. Retrospective development of theory of change	Some logframes. Some newer programmes have ToC. In all cases, evaluation teams develop the ToC	Being introduced through the evaluation system. All evaluations now develop ToCs
<b>Type of evaluations</b>	14 implementation/ process evaluations, 1 impact	Implementation, 4 process evaluations and 3 impact evaluations	45 implementations (process, some summative), 8 impact, 5 diagnostic, 1 economic (DPME 2017a)
<b>Methodologies well identified and mutually integrated</b>	Guideline developed in 2017	Evaluation methodology proposed by evaluation team and verified by the Sub-committee	A series of guidelines elaborate the system. In general, a theory-based evaluation system is being promoted

Source: Authors' compilation

► and agencies in South Africa and Benin, but these are emergent at ministry level in Uganda’s case. Few of these departmental M&E Units have the capacity to support evaluations and ways are being sought to take forward evaluations where there is limited capacity (see Table 2).

In terms of coordination with donor M&E, donors are integrated with the system in Uganda, contributing to a basket of funding, and in Benin many evaluations are funded by donors. In South Africa, donors are rarer, and so not integral to the national M&E system.

**Capacity**

Benin (BEPP, 2010) and Uganda have undertaken some skills assessment of their respective technical staffs, but not South Africa. South Africa has developed competences for evaluators and government staff who manage evaluations. One emerging way to address capacity challenges are peer learning forums

or communities of practice for sharing of the ‘how to’ and ‘what works’. All three countries are currently engaged in a diagnostic of their supply and demand of evaluators through Twende Mbele.

Another capacity issue is that of policy-makers and their ability to use evaluation reports. As part of an advocacy campaign to promote use of M&E, South Africa has run a series of courses for top levels managers. In all cases, there could be greater formalization of the identification of capacity needs and this is planned in the Twende Mbele programme.

**Participation of actors outside the executive**

There is a key role for the different players within the evaluation ecosystem, (e.g. universities who train evaluators and evaluation associations). For example, SAMEA and the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR) Anglophone Africa are participating in the Steering Committee for the ►

**Table 2: Organizational elements**

Components	Benin	Uganda	South Africa
<b>Institutional structure for coordination and oversight</b>	BEPPAG, Presidency. National Evaluation Board selects evaluations, and involves range of stakeholders	GEF in OPM National Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Working Group	DPME ‘owner’ of system. Supported by Evaluation Technical Working Group involving national and provincial departments
<b>Evaluation and/or M&amp;E units in line ministries</b>	All line ministries have own M&E system that links to Ministry of Planning	M&E Policy recommended creation of M&E units. OPM working with Ministry of Public Service to establish M&E units	All national and provincial departments have M&E units. Sector M&E units link vertically
<b>Evaluation and/or M&amp;E units at decentralized levels</b>	All line ministries have own M&E system that links to Ministry of Planning	M&E function is performed under planning units. Efforts underway to have specific evaluation staff	All provinces have M&E units, but connection on M&E not systematic with national.
<b>Methodologies well identified and mutually integrated</b>	In the Ministry of Planning	M&E Department relates with the donor economists group, and the Donor Partnership Forum	Donors do not play a big role and so focus is on the government

Source: Data from Government partners

► evaluation of the NES in South Africa. In Benin, civil society is part of the National Evaluation Board (NEB).

In South Africa and Uganda, there is a systematic engagement with Parliament on the results of evaluations (see Table 3). This is starting in Benin. In Uganda and Benin, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are involved through committees in the selection and oversight of evaluations. Other key actors include universities who deliver some of the capacity development work and may also bid for undertaking evaluations.

**Quality and use**

All three countries have a focus on ensuring the use of evaluations, sharing findings through workshops with stakeholders and senior management

and a formal process of submitting the recommendations to ministries – however, all countries are looking at how to strengthen this aspect.

In all three countries, the results of evaluations are presented to Cabinet, which gives weight to implementation. There is a formal follow-up process in Uganda and South Africa with some form of improvement plan generated after the evaluation to indicate how recommendations will be implemented. In South Africa, there can be a tension with these improvement plans being treated by departments as a compliance exercise. It is most important that departments want to do the evaluations, and so want to develop and implement improvement plans. Work is going on currently in all three countries to strengthen this aspect. ►

**Table 3: Comparing participation by stakeholders across the three countries.**

	Benin	Uganda	South Africa
<b>Role of Parliament in M&amp;E</b>	Now working to develop the collaboration	Summary of evaluations presented to Parliamentary Committee on Budget (PACOB) and Committee on Presidential Affairs. Directorate also works closely with Parliament on APNODE	All evaluations sent to relevant committees. Chairs briefed on the role of evaluation. Study tours run with Appropriations Committee. Limited engagement with APNODE
<b>Role of civil society</b>	CSOs represented in National Evaluation Board, which plays a role in all evaluations and dissemination of findings	CSOs engaged through National M&E Technical Working Group; Evaluation Sub-Committee and Uganda Evaluation Association which works closely with the Directorate on capacity-building and on evaluations	No systematic role for civil society -often on steering committees. Collaboration with SAMEA
<b>Role of donors</b>	Donors have funded all evaluations. Sometimes participate in validation process	Donors funded most evaluations through GEF. Donors engaged through National M&E Technical Working Group; Evaluation Sub-Committee; National Partnership Forum; Local Development Partner Group	Donors have funded parts of the system but do not participate.

**Source:** Data from government partners. African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE); CSO, Civil Society Organization; SA, South Africa





## ► The emerging lessons

As evaluation widens in Africa, including through the support of Twende Mbele, there are emerging lessons which can be harnessed in supporting this roll out.

A key feature of the three countries is that a central unit in the Presidency or OPM was given the mandate to *lead* the evaluation system and so has the authority to take the system forward. This ensures significant political will to make an evaluation system work. Even where there are a few staff in the central unit (Benin), there has been an ability to leverage resources to get evaluations happening and an NES in place.

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Initial lessons include the importance of a central unit to drive the evaluation system, developing a national evaluation policy, prioritizing evaluations through an evaluation agenda or plan, and taking evaluation to subnational levels. These lessons are being used to support other countries seeking to establish national evaluation systems, such as Ghana, Kenya and Niger.

Having the *policy* in advance (as South Africa did) does not seem necessary although there needs to be some definition of how the system will work, how it will provide for impartiality, etc. Other countries such as Niger, Kenya and Ghana have developed or are developing national evaluation policies and will add their

learning to the experiences of South Africa, Benin and Uganda in doing so.

Given limited resources and capacity, all three countries have started their respective NESs with priority national-level evaluations expressed in an evaluation plan or agenda using donor resources where needed but driving the agenda themselves. This is important if evaluation is to become part of countries' strategic agendas, not just imposed by donors.

Evaluation systems are extending beyond the national level; in South Africa to provincial level and Benin is keen to extend its evaluation system to municipal levels. South Africa now has some outstanding examples of provincial evaluation plans, with province alone having done 23 provincial evaluations. Progressively developing these systems is essential, while demonstrating what can be done and building interest in governments and with wider stakeholders.

In terms of *evaluation type*, sometimes there is an emphasis on impact evaluations (particularly through donor influence), however, in practice all countries are predominantly using implementation evaluations looking at what is working and why. These are less technically complex and can be done with local capacity, and quicker to undertake and feed back into policy or future programmes. Twende Mbele is also looking at sharing and adapting some rapid evaluation tools, that may be better suited to the policy implementation cycle.

In terms of *methodology*, theory-based evaluation is one way that evaluation can be undertaken even where there are data deficiencies, and thereby assisting where the underlying programme logic may well not have been well. The three countries are moving to using theory of change and logic models as a core element of the process. In this way, countries are adapting Western models of evaluation to local realities. ►



► *Participation* of non-state actors differs. In South Africa, there has been more of a focus on the executive, rather than Parliament or non-state actors. In the other two countries, the role of NGOs and donors in promoting civil society has been stronger. In all cases, the main involvement of the private sector is as consultants undertaking commissioned evaluation, or in some cases being part of evaluation steering committees, for example, for evaluations of business incentives in South Africa. Twende Mbele is starting some research on where involvement of csos can strengthen national M&E systems which is likely to result in some pilots of specific interventions. This can be important in providing different viewpoints, enhancing accountability and keeping pressure on implementation of the recommendations of evaluations.

Benin, Uganda and South Africa are seeking to involve Parliament which will likely strengthen their use of M&E in their oversight roles. The African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE) has a potentially important role in stimulating the demand of African parliaments around the use of M&E, and Twende Mbele will also be funding training of Parliamentarians and the development of oversight tools.

The key challenges facing these three NESs are:

- A stronger focus on monitoring than on evaluation, and a lack of acceptance of and resistance to evaluation. Evaluation is often seen as an accountability tool rather than as a tool for learning.
- A funding challenge because evaluation is seen as secondary to programme implementation and monitoring.
- A lack of evaluator and government staff evaluation capacity.

- Ensuring that evaluations are followed-up and recommendations are implemented.

Constrained budgets are also a key challenge. Countries like Benin and Uganda, for example, show that when government budgets are very constrained, donor resources can be harnessed in ways where the agenda is set by government, even if the predominant funding for the evaluations themselves comes from donors. Uganda's use of a 'basket

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of funding' from donors and government also means that there is not necessarily one donor having influence on one evaluation.

A big challenge faced by all countries is capacity – the capacity of evaluators in the country to conduct evaluations and the capacity in government to commission, undertake, manage and use evaluations. Until training in evaluation becomes more widespread, this will be a major constraint. This is a key role that CLEAR AA is playing in the region and a major area of intervention of Twende Mbele.

Another challenge is *follow-up*. The central agencies such as OPM in Uganda

play a big role in ensuring that evaluations are implemented successfully. However, responsibility shifts to the implementing departments during the implementation phase. All three countries are seeking some way to hold these departments to account for implementing the recommendations, but much work is still needed on how to ensure that the intrinsic motivation is in place to address the findings, that suitable mechanisms are in place to track implementation and to engage in conversations about how to ensure effective implementation. There is an important role for Parliaments and csos in holding departments to account for implementing these improvement plans.

## Conclusion

Since 2010, Benin, Uganda and South Africa have undertaken a significant effort to mainstream evaluations in the

work of government, in very differing political situations and with differing resource constraints.

These systems have to reflect local realities and challenges as mentioned above. There is considerable local innovation in how to establish these systems, and adaptive management as these systems develop – an example of ‘Made in Africa’ rather than mimicry of the West. In terms of use, there is evidence of a significant portion of evaluations having recommendations implemented and we are beginning to see examples of integration with the budget process. We see an emerging process of innovation and piloting, building capacity, and with an ongoing need for political will to ensure use of evaluation findings. The peer learning approach has already enhanced these systems, and the resources being made available through the Twende Mbele programme provide an opportunity to deepen this and to expand evaluation to other countries in Africa.

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